

No. 37.

Price One Penny.

ONE PENNY WEEKLY.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

STANFIELD HALL.

BY J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

LONDON:

PUBLISHED AT THE "LONDON JOURNAL" OFFICE,
12 and 13, FETTER LANE.

All Back Numbers still on Sale.



VOL. II.



[THE LETTER.]

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proceeded with her usual quiet step to the chamber of her unhappy mother.

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When Walter parted with Patch on his way to Calais with Wolsey's letters to Campeggio his mind was agitated by a thousand doubts and fears. Not that he suspected the jester of treachery ; on that point he felt at least secure. But his words pointed to some portending danger—something fatal to his love—perhaps to the happiness of Mary ; and that future, which had lately seemed so bright and fair, so full of hope and promise, was once more clouded by the gathering tempest and approaching storm.

At Feversham, where he halted on the second night of his journey, he encountered, in the little inn at which he had been directed to stop, a party of travellers—merchants seemingly, whose conduct, without the clue given to him by his friend, would have excited his suspicions. They conversed freely upon the subject of the divorce, then the engrossing topic of the day, and appeared, despite their peaceful occupation, ready to pick a quarrel and cut the throat of any man who argued that Henry was not justified in his demand. The host of the Golden Crown was equally loyal.

“Of course our bluff King Hal is right,” he exclaimed, as he ladled the soup into the wooden bowls which were ranged for the guests upon a clumsy oaken table, strewed with herbs by way of garniture. “What is the use of being king, if he is not to have his own way ? Marry ! ” he added, “if things progress as they have done of late, I should not wonder if men dispute, at last, his grace’s right to govern his kingdom as he pleases, since disloyal knaves begin to cavil at his pleasure.”

What would the speaker have said had he lived to witness the altered state of royalty at the present day ? But he spoke, however, in the spirit of the times in which he lived.

By this time the soup was served, and the *benedicite* pronounced by a friar, who chanced to be amongst the company, and not an unob servant spectator of what was passing. Each traveller being served, they produced from their pockets, or from the small satchels which the better orders wore at their sides, spoons of boxwood or metal, and set lustily to their repast, for few houses of entertainment at the period of which we write furnished their guests with such conveniences, each one being obliged to find his knife ; as for forks, they were generally unknown.

“Is it far you travel, sir ? ” demanded the elder of the merchants, addressing Walter, who was seated next him.

“To Calais,” replied our hero, who fancied that he was not entirely a stranger to the voice of the speaker, whose person, however, was too well disguised, if his conjectures were right, for him to recognise.

“I, too, am bound for France, to purchase merchandise ; which,

sooth to say, finds a ready sale at Courts where foreign braveries are all the favour, and turn the honest penny to the trader's hand."

This was touching upon one of the most delicate topics of the day, for there had lately been fierce disputes between the citizens of London and the foreign merchants, who engrossed the trade of the metropolis in their hands. Henry VII., with a view to benefit his dominions, had laid down stipulations in most of the treaties which he formed with foreign powers for establishing a commercial intercourse between them and Great Britain. He encouraged Italians and Germans to visit his kingdom to dispose of foreign goods, and to take in exchange woollen cloths, tin, and lead. At first these foreigners were compelled to pay double duty on the goods which they imported; but this being found detrimental to commerce, the customs were abated, and the trade rapidly increased. Thus we see that even in the fifteenth century the principle of free trade was beginning to be understood. In the reign of his son, the display and amusements, the dress and extravagance of the Court, the emulation to excel in every species of splendour amongst the nobility, and the intercourse with the French, who have always excelled us in all that is gay and costly, naturally occasioned an enormous demand for silks, damasks, jewels, wines, and luxuries of every description. These articles were chiefly supplied by Florentine or Venetian merchants, to whom great protection was given, and who acquired, by their monopoly of the trade vast wealth in this country. Hence jealousies had arisen; and these insolent foreigners, boasting of the favour of the king, inflicted all those petty insults upon the English mechanics and traders, which persons accustomed themselves to obsequious deportment to their superiors delight to offer whenever they have an opportunity. The conflict broke out between the two parties upon the following occasion.

Williamson, a carpenter, having purchased two stockdoves, was rudely deprived of them by a Frenchman, who insolently declared that they were not fit meat for a fellow like him. The poor man urged in vain that, having paid for them, he had a right to regale himself with them. The thief ran off declaring that he would carry them to the French ambassador's. He did so, and found shelter in his house. The poor Englishman, disappointed of his birds, naturally gave vent to his indignation, in no very measured language; for which he was committed, at the request of the minister, to prison. The ambassador, being shortly afterwards sued by the mayor of the city for the delivery of the prisoner, made answer that, by the body of God, the English knave should lose his life, for that no Englishman should venture to deny what a Frenchman required; nor would he give any other reply to the friends of the poor carpenter.

This, and similar acts of tyranny, so incensed the citizens that

they requested Dr. Edee to preach against the privileges which the foreigners enjoyed. Encounters between them and the 'prentices became of frequent—nay, almost hourly—occurrence ; till at last the mob attacked Newgate, and released not only the carpenter, but several other prisoners, who had been committed for insulting these pampered, insolent strangers.

The riot at last reached such a pitch, that the Earls of Surrey and Shrewsbury were sent with a body of troops to subdue them. The ringleaders being secured, commissioners were appointed to decide on the fate of the offenders. The court, over which the Duke of Norfolk presided, sat in Guildhall, and the prisoners, to the number of 270, were introduced, tied together with ropes. Thirteen of the citizens were executed upon gibbets erected in those parts of the City where the principal disturbances had occurred, to the disgust as well as terror of the inhabitants.

Henry, perceiving that the commissioners were pushing the affair with too much severity, pretended to yield to the entreaties of the three queens—Katherine of Arragon and his sisters Mary of France and Margaret of Scotland, who fell upon their knees and demanded pardon for the citizens—a petition which the king, as Stowe informs us in his *Chronicles*, reluctantly accorded. Only imagine thirteen citizens being executed in the present age for a simple riot caused by the overbearing insolence of a Frenchman ! This little episode is, however, but a faithful picture of what took place in the good old times, which the blind idolators of the past sometimes tell us we shall never see again, to which we doubt not but that the majority of our readers will exclaim, “Heaven forbid they should !”

No sooner had the supposed trader therefore declared his intention of proceeding to France to purchase merchandise than a volley of abuse from several of the guests broke out, and words at last rose to such a pitch that swords were drawn. Walter, whose disposition naturally inclined him to side with the weaker party, had already drawn his, and ranged himself by the person assailed, when the friar, who had remained an unconcerned spectator of the scene, approached and whispered in his ear a caution to be prudent. He turned and eyed the friendly monitor, but he was a stranger to him.

“Whilst you remain tranquil,” said the speaker, “there will be no blood drawn ; it is against you their swords are drawn, and not against each other.”

The observation, which accorded so well with the information which his friend Patch had given him, recalled him to his senses, and he quietly resumed his seat, when, as the friar had predicted, the dispute gradually subsided, and the quarrellers became once more friends.

“Leave the packet !” whispered the churchman, as he withdrew

for the night, “ upon the stool beside the bed, and take no heed of what passes ; there is danger even in the blinking of an eye. Act as you have been recommended, and you are safe.”

Whatever might have been our hero’s previous determination, he now resolved to follow implicitly the advice of the speaker, whom he judged at once to be an agent of Wolsey’s. Bidding him, therefore, a good-night, he proceeded to his chamber, which contained two beds, one of them occupied by the trader whose avowal had occasioned the pretended dispute amongst the guests. Following the directions of his unknown friend, he placed the packet by the side of his pallet, and cast himself, half-dressed, upon the straw-covered couch. Few inns in the reign of Henry VIII. afforded better accommodation than that simple, but not very luxurious, material. Despite the repeated assurance of safety which he had received, he took the precaution of taking his sword to bed with him ; for, as he wisely argued to himself, it was at least one guarantee the more.

In the extraordinary position in which he was placed, our hero found it, despite the fatigue he had undergone, impossible to sleep. With his half-closed eyes he lay for some time watching the pallet opposite to him ; the hard, regular breathings of its occupant announced that he slept, or pretended to do so. Gradually these breathings became less and less distinct, till at last they entirely ceased, and Walter saw the pretended trader rise from the bed, upon which he had thrown himself half-dressed, and cautiously creep towards the stool upon which he had placed the important packet, quietly possess himself of it, and hasten from the apartment. In less than ten minutes afterwards the sound of horses’ feet upon the stony road informed him that the successful robber had departed with his prize.

“ But for the word of one I am bound to trust,” muttered the dissatisfied youth, “ I had not lain here to be plundered like a sleeping cur. ‘Sdeath ! how I longed to spring upon the thief and try the mettle of his courage ! Though perhaps,” he added with a sigh “ ‘tis better as it is.”

“ Much better,” murmured a voice, which must have been near him for the speaker to have caught his words.

Walter with one bound started from his couch, and stood upon the floor of the chamber, sword in hand.

“ Who is there ? ” he demanded, glancing round the room, which was imperfectly lighted by the small lamp hanging from a rafter in the ceiling, the ponderous timbers of which, rudely put together, supported the roof of the house.

“ Look up,” was the reply, “ and you will see.”

He did so, and beheld the friar who had given him the warning below, crouching like a squatting Indian behind one of the massive pieces of woodwork directly over the bed on which he had been

resting. From the gloom of the chamber it required a strong sight, as well as a minute examination, to trace the outline of a human figure amongst the beams and timbers of the roof. When, however, he could sufficiently distinguish, he saw, not without a vague feeling of terror, that the speaker held an arbalette in his hand; so that, in fact, all the while he had been reclining on the couch, his life had been entirely at his mysterious friend's disposal.

"Help me down," said the speaker.

The young man did as he was directed; and as soon as the stranger reached the floor, he seated himself upon the bed, and motioned to Walter to take a seat upon the stool beside him.

"If Sir John had remained much longer, I must have called out," said the pretended friar; "I have had the cramp this half-hour."

"Sir John! You know the robber then?" demanded the messenger.

"I should think I do," replied the fellow, with a comical expression of countenance.

"And his name?"

"Sir John Perrot, the favourite of the king."

"And what was thy errand here?" demanded Walter.

"To watch over thy safety," replied the fellow; and no unnecessary one, judging from thy want of prudence whilst below."

"And thine arbalette——"

"Would have sent a bolt to the false knight's heart, had he broken faith with us and played thee false. You may sleep securely now," continued the speaker; "in the morning write the letter as directed—I will be the bearer. Then wend you way to where you are directed."

"And that," said Walter, willing to ascertain how far the friar was intrusted by his friend, "is to——"

"Where concerns not me," interrupted his companion; "Patch is a cunning gamester, and never shows his hand: he may at times let fall a card or two, but holds the leading trumps. Good night," he added, at the same time throwing himself upon the pallet where Sir John Perrot had so lately lain; "my task is ended, thine perchance begins."

The young man followed his example, but it was a long time before he could compose himself to sleep. The events of the last few days appeared a mystery to him. One thing, at least, was clear to his understanding—that Henry's favourite servant and confidant was in the interests either of the cardinal or the jester; how else could the intended robbery have been made to answer the purpose of the former, by substituting such a letter as the ambitious statesman knew would serve him with his master, whilst the one really intended for Campeggio was forwarded by a second

messenger ? But whether his eminence was a party to the warning he had received, or that he owed it, as well as the precautions taken to insure his safety, to the friendship of Patch, he was at a loss to decide. His tired thoughts gradually gave way to nature's sweet restorative, and he closed his eyes at last, to dream of love and its delusive hopes.

* * * * *

In the reign of Henry VIII. the chief bankers and money-lenders were the Jews and foreign merchants. Marrietti, one of the most considerable of these money-lenders, was seated in his shop in Lombard-street, expatiating upon the beauty of a Venetian chain which a gallant of the Court was cheapening, when a young man, apparently much fatigued with travel, crossed the threshold of his house.

"Ha ! nephew," said the Italian, extending his hand to him, "welcome home again ! You found the merchandise, I trust, all right at Calais ?"

"Merchandise !" repeated the young man, who in fact was no other than our old friend Walter.

"Ay, merchandise," repeated the little old man sharply. "Marry, this comes of giving boys a holiday, as if thou couldst not have combined pleasure and profit at the same time. I warrant me thou hast not forgot to spend the five crowns I gave thee. But get thee in," he added : "it was an evil hour when I consented at my sister's bidding to take such a scapegrace 'prentice."

Without giving the astonished youth time to speak a word, the irascible little usurer pushed him into a small inner room at the back of his shop, and closed the door upon him.

"Ah ! my lord," he said to the nobleman, who had been too much occupied in admiring his purchase to pay much attention to the features of the young man, "you are fortunate ; you are not plagued with the care of such a nephew. Two hundred ducats," he continued, returning to the previous subject of their conversation, "is the lowest price ; the carbuncles and rare pearls, as I am an honest man, are worth the money."

The bargain was speedily concluded, and the lover of the fair Geraldine—for it was no other than the gallant Surrey—left the merchant's house on his way to London Bridge, there to take water for Hampton, where the object of his poetic love was residing with her father, the Earl of Kildare, whose family, according to the learned Dr. Knott, trace their descent from the Geraldis of Florence, and are not, as is generally supposed, of Irish origin ; hence the fair girl's romantic name of Geraldine.

No sooner had the young nobleman departed than the merchant let fall the heavy wooden shutters which hung suspended, as it were, by strong cords over the unglazed windows of his shop, and drew the ponderous bolts. Before closing the outward door he

methodically lit his lamp, and then proceeded to make it fast. Satisfied at last that all was secure, he opened the door of communication, and entered the little dark chamber where Walter was sitting.

"Well, nephew," exclaimed the old man, with a shrewd smile, "how feel you after your voyage?"

"Somewhat fatigued, uncle," replied the young traveller, in the same bantering tone, "since I find that such is the relationship between us; though I question if our fathers would not have been more surprised at it than we are."

"Perhaps so," said the merchant, eyeing him keenly, and muttering something to himself about the impossibility of his being mistaken. "But doubtless you have a token to convince those who are sceptical," he added.

His guest thrust his hand into his bosom, and produced the little silver bell which Patch had given him. The usurer's doubts were satisfied. Cordially holding out his hand, he bade him welcome to his humble roof, and informed him that he had been prepared for his reception by the jester, who had so minutely described his person that he had recognised him the instant he entered the shop, and treated him as he had, fearful lest the Earl of Surrey, who was so much about the Court, should recognise him, as he had done.

The speaker seemed astonished when his guest assured him that the danger had been purely an imaginary one; for that, with the exception of a late occasion, he had never placed his foot within a royal residence.

"No matter, my lord," replied the old man with a smile of incredulity; "I seek not your name or quality. The token you have brought answers for all."

"But I am no lord," said Walter, not wishing to assume a rank to which he had no claim.

"I have no right to pry into your secrets," replied the old man with an incredulous smile, as he led the way into the interior of the house. "Were you the poorest horse-boy that ever rode in a noble's train, and brought that token with you, you were equally welcome to my roof."

In the course of the evening the fugitive was joined by his old friend Patch, who conducted himself in the house of the usurer as if he were at home, ordering him to bring up the wines he named, and prepare supper for himself and guest.

"One word," exclaimed our hero, "to relieve my anxious heart; the Lady Mary——"

"Is well and safe as yet."

"As yet," repeated Walter; "tell me?"

"Patience—patience!" interrupted the jester; "I know 'tis difficult for young blood to curb the restless whisperings of the heart, its doubts and jealous fears; but thou hast seen more than

most men of thy gossip's prudence ; with thee I have almost laid aside my mask ; thou knowest that thou canst trust me. Give thanks and eat," he added, as the repast was placed upon the table, "for we must ride to-night."

"Where ?" demanded his companion.

"To chase the moonbeams or the wild-fire's light," said Patch, with a laugh ; "those who ride with me must ride with confidence as blind as faith, leap at destruction, and without a doubt. Dost question me, roysterer ?" he continued ; "knowest thou not old Mammon here and I are of earth's kings the kings, since gold and folly rule the gore-stained earth ?"

"I'll question thee no more !" exclaimed the young man ; "thou art a sphinx, which OEdipus himself had never guessed—a thing to be admired, not understood."

"What, boy !" replied the jester, "wouldst batter me with thy humanities ?—compare me to Thebes' monster ? And yet," he added, "the simile is just, for both were never rightly understood."

"How dost thou understand it ?"

"As the Greeks of old," answered the humorist : "the sphinx is nothing more than poor humanity, as tyranny and superstition have disfigured it ; when once its rights are known, its wrongs redressed, the monster is destroyed, but all the god remains. "Come," he continued, rising from the table, "a cup of Cyprus wine ere we depart, as yellow as thy gold, old Plutus, and a thousand times more precious. Are our horses ready ?"

"They are," answered the obsequious merchant, at the same time pouring the costly wine into two small silver cups which he handed Patch and his guest.

"Success to our enterprise," exclaimed the former as he drained the cup, "and now then to horse. Keep careful watch," he added, "that we wait not an instant on our return."

After seeing that his companion as well as himself were well armed, they quitted the mansion of their host by the back part of the house, and mounted two horses, which they found waiting for them. The jester led a third one by the rein. It was a gloomy night ; the rain fell in torrents as they set out, but gradually subsided ere they reached their journey's end, which Walter found, to his surprise, to be the palace of the king at Greenwich. Following the example of his guide, he fastened his steed to a tree at the outskirt of the park, and followed him cautiously to a small pavilion, situated at the end of the terrace, where but a few days since he had been presented to the king, and where he last beheld the object of his passion. It was evident that the isolated chamber was inhabited, or that an inmate was expected, for lights streamed through the richly-stained window in the chamber above, and cast party-coloured rays upon the sward where they were standing.

"Thank Heaven, we are in time!" exclaimed the jester.

"In time for what?"

"Thou wilt see. Follow me to the terrace; but, above all, be silent."

Walter did as he was directed. They had not ensconced themselves more than an hour behind a clump of shrubs, when they beheld a man muffled in an ample mantle, and preceded by a page bearing a torch, quit the palace, and direct his steps towards the pavilion. From his burly port, they knew it was the king. As soon as he entered, Patch quitted the concealment, and hastening to the door, securely fastened it by a contrivance which he had brought with him for the purpose.

"Now, then, to the front of the pavilion," he whispered; "not a moment is to be lost."

"What mean you?"

"The heiress of Stanfield is in that temple of iniquity with the king."

Walter needed no further inducement; his very heart seemed to be on fire; the grass scarcely bent beneath the elastic pressure of his tread. As soon as they were beneath the windows, Patch drew a ladder from some bushes, which our hero hastily ascended. As he reached the topmost stave, a shriek fell upon his ear. With a giant's strength he dashed open the casement, and leaped into the chamber, and found the orphan struggling with the king.

"Saved!" she exclaimed, as she cast herself upon his neck; "O Walter, you have indeed preserved me from perdition!"

The baffled Henry absolutely foamed with rage and disappointment, for he was unarmed. Yet, relying on his great personal strength, he seemed at one moment inclined to brave the contest, which Walter perceiving, drew his sword.

"Back, tyrant!" said the young man, sternly, at the same time bringing the point of his weapon to a level with his breast; "one step nearer, and I forget thou art my sovereign, as thou hast long since forgotten the ties of honour, knighthood, and humanity."

"Slave!" muttered Henry, "down at my feet—crouch for thy beggar's life! Let me but raise my voice—"

"And thy last cry shall follow it!" interrupted the young man. "Thy hot blood stains my sword; why should I hesitate?" he added; "why spare the wolf who knows no touch of mercy?"

"He is thy king," whispered the orphan. "Stain not thy soul with treason; leave him to Heaven and his conscience."

At this moment Patch appeared upon the summit of the ladder, and motioned to them that it was time to depart. Hastily passing the rescued maiden toward the window, Walter stood upon his guard, between her and the king, whilst she descended. Several times Henry essayed to speak, but passion held him silent. In his mind he resolved, the instant the intruder should follow the

example of his intended victim, to raise an alarm and cause them to be pursued. The young man he destined for the rack and cord, the orphan for his infamous embrace.

Scarcely had these thoughts revolved within his head, than Patch once more mounted to the window sill, and whispered to his companion to descend.

“What, ho! Treason!” exclaimed the monarch, as our hero placed his foot on the window-sill.

His further words were silenced by Patch, who hastily cast a small ball into the window, which burst as it fell, and filled the chamber with a dense vapour;—in a moment the excited monarch sank senseless upon the floor.

“You have killed him,” whispered Walter, as they reached the ground.

“Small fear of that,” replied the jester, “and even if I had, monarch as he is, he would have been lawfully judged and executed. I told you,” he added, “we should one day bless the chance which made us the leech’s heritors. You see my words come true.”

As quickly as possible the three fugitives gained their horses, and never drew rein until they were safely housed with the friendly merchant in Lombard-street.

CHAPTER XII.

‘Tis sweet to roam with those we love,
When the pretty stars are peeping,
Like angels watching from above,
But at distance kindly keeping.

—“THE VENETIAN.”

THE next morning even those who were accustomed to the capricious temper of the king were astonished at the brutal ferocity which he displayed towards all who approached him. The adventure and disappointment of the preceding night rankled deeply in his revengeful soul, and in his fury he mentally threatened destruction not only to the hero of it, but to the innocent object of his licentious passion. Private orders, sealed with his own signet, were despatched to the governors of the principal sea-ports, giving a minute description of the persons both of Walter and the heiress of Stanfield, and commanding their arrest should they attempt to quit the kingdom. As for Patch, he had been so carefully disguised and kept so far in the background, that his share in the transaction was not likely to be suspected.

“Leo seems in an amiable mood this morning,” whispered the

last-named personage to the poet, Sir Thomas Wyat, who stood conversing with him in one of the deep bay windows of the presence-chamber at Greenwich, where the jester had attended Wolsey in his usual visit to the king. "At least," added the speaker, "if we may judge from the scared looks of the jackal. See how he sneaks from the royal den; perhaps he has encountered the fangs of the regal brute as well as his growl."

This observation was occasioned by the crest-fallen appearance of Sir John Perrot, who issued from the king's closet with the air of a man not quite assured whether or no his head still sat upon his shoulders. The humbled courtier cast a reproachful glance at Patch as he passed the window where he and his companions stood. To the latter it seemed to deprecate the jester's usually sarcastic humour, who, however, perfectly understood it, and returned it by a triumphant smile, for he feared not the minion's treachery—he was completely in his power.

"Why, Sir John," he exclaimed, advancing from the window to meet him, "from thy woe-begone countenance one would imagine there was an end to all intrigue at Court—that honesty was to be henceforth the language of the day, or that, like a whipped scholar, thou wert pouting over a new lesson. Courage, man," he added, bitterly; "let Courts become as honest as they may, there will still be found a use for such as thee."

"Thou art a hard taskmaster, Patch," replied the knight, in an under-tone; "a man may as well give hand to Satan, as take service with thee. The king," he added, "is furious."

"More so than you expected?" coolly demanded the jester.

"Hath threatened to disgrace me," continued the knight.

"Impossible," said his tormentor, in a tone of undisguised contempt, which made the courtier writhe, for he perfectly understood the speaker's meaning: "not even Henry's power can accomplish that; despot as he is, you may defy him there. Kings, like other men," he added, "fail at impossibilities."

"At least," faltered Sir John, blushing with shame and anger as he spoke, "it can affect my life. This very hour his highness swore to trample me as mire beneath his feet, should he but prove my treachery."

"Indeed!" replied the jester, with a quiet laugh, at the same time turning on his heel and leaving him, "fortune favours thee in thy disgrace, for, like the worthless fish cast back into the lake, thou'l find thy element."

The knight, unable to conceal his mortification at the sarcasm, which conscience told him he merited, hastened from the presence-chamber, revolving in his mind whether it were not wisest to confess all and trust to Henry's mercy, than to continue the slave of such an ungracious task-master as the jester. Reflection, however, soon convinced him that the bark of his tormentor was

worse than his bite, and he resolved to let things take their usual course.

At this moment Henry issued from the royal closet. He was wrapped in a long, loose gown of cloth of gold, lined with sables; and instead of the barret or hat which Holbein has rendered familiar to most English readers, his head was covered with a purple velvet hood, which gave a ghastly expression to his unusually pale features. In short, it was evident from his whole appearance that he still felt the effects of the jester's parting gift, which left him for a long time senseless on the floor of the pavilion.

"Where be these legates?" he exclaimed, "these sloths of Rome—these Fabian politicians, who trust to tire our patience by delay? Knows my lord of York," he added, in a loud, harsh tone, "that we have twice demanded his fair presence?"

"His eminence is in the chapel with Campeggio, sire," faltered Sir Henry Denny, who, more perhaps than any courtier present, trembled at the ungovernable temper of the king.

"'Sdeath! go tell the red-caps we attend them here, and by their own appointing. The sun is bright, the air of heaven blows keenly. We would not lose our match for twenty times their bidding. Go, Suffolk," he added in a kinder tone, turning to his brother-in-law, "order our train to mount; and tell Le March we'll fly the Norway falcon our sister Margaret sent us."

The duke bowed, and left the presence-chamber to execute the orders he had received.

No one knew better than the infuriated monarch that both Wolsey and Campeggio had been above three hours waiting to obtain an interview; for, in fact, it was by his own private orders that they were thus discourteously received, for virtually their mission was at an end, since an inhibition had been received to stop their proceedings as legates. The Pope, who was devoted to Katherine's nephew, the Emperor Charles, had, however, with his usual duplicity, exempted the king from the penalties which the inhibition imposed on all such as should abet the process of the divorce. The politics of Clement VII. were most disastrous to the Holy See; they lost eventually three kingdoms to its triple crown.

"'Tis well, my lord!" exclaimed Henry, at the same time contemptuously crushing in his hand the Papal indulgence which Campeggio, in the hope of soothing his wrath, had presented him with. "Since Rome denies us justice, we must seek a remedy within ourselves. Your mission ended as it began, in bitter mockery and deceit, albeit in that we blame not you. We will not longer detain you at our Court. Your brother of York," he added, for the first time during the interview casting a cold glance on Wolsey, "will order your departure with all honour. Farewell! St. George and our Lady speed you!"

Without waiting for a reply, or deigning further salutation to

either of the legates, the king turned upon his heel and entered the royal closet to prepare for his morning ride, calling lustily to Sir Henry Norris to see the falconers were in readiness. The mortified churchmen, humbled and confused by their reception, retired to the lodging of Wolsey amid the sneers of the courtiers, who already anticipated the haughty favourite's downfall.

"The period of your master's favour has arrived, friend Patch," whispered Sir Thomas Wyat, as they crossed the courtyard of the palace ; "the bark of Peter is in peril."

"It has weathered," replied the jester carelessly, "a rougher storm than this ; the tempest is never so near exhausted as when it rages loudest."

"Thou art poetical in thy description, man : fortune hath misplaced thee ; she should have made a minstrel, not a jester, of thee ; thou hast a poet's soul, if not his verse."

His companion fixed his eyes upon him with an expression half-mocking, half-serious, as he replied in his own quaint style.

"Are there no poets, then, but such as deal in rhyme ? Tut, man ! they are but the scholars of their art. Those who can play with human passion—oppose the fox's cunning to the lion's strength—trace even through crime the fine connecting link, the golden thread which holds humanity in one vast whole—or touch the secret key-notes of the heart, making deep melodies or fearful discords—such are your poets ; those who write are rhymesters."

"A lesson ! and in mine own art !" exclaimed the knight, astonished at the new phase in his strange companion's character. "Thou art a very protean personage. I find as many changes in thee—"

"As in thy mistress's humour or dame Fortune's smiles," said the jester, finishing the sentence for him ; "but fare thee well. I must to my master—you, doubtless, to the hawking with the king. Beware," he added, with a significant look, "how you cross the royal falconer in his sport. Should you ride towards Hever, loose not the jesses of your bird—cast not your hawk that way."

Hever Castle was the residence of Anne Boleyn, for whom the poet's passion was more than suspected by the Court.

Sir Thomas understood the hint, and, nodding adieu to the friendly giver, walked musingly away.

On entering the cardinal's chamber, Patch found his eminence pacing up and down the apartment alone ; the courtiers who generally thronged his ante-chamber had already deserted it in anticipation of his disgrace. The usually flushed features of the churchman were pale, and it was evident, from the compressed lips, that he was struggling to subdue an emotion which, once given way to, would, like a torrent, bear everything before it.

"Alone, my lord !" said the jester, with a well-affected expression of surprise.

"Doth that astonish thee?" exclaimed Wolsey, bitterly; "the sun hath set, and friends are, like shadows, seen only when it shines. This worse than folly, this madness of the Court of Rome, joined with the king's hot passion for Anne Boleyn, hath ruined me. I have touched the climax of my greatness, and must, perforce, descend. My enemies prevail at last."

"One way," observed the person whom the speaker had so singularly chosen for his confidant, "remains to crush them, and knit thyself yet closer to the capricious Henry's heart."

"Name it," said the astonished churchman, surprised that the speaker should have found a clue to escape the danger at which even his experience felt appalled.

"Your eminence is still legate?" demanded Patch.

"Thou knowest I am."

"And can convoke the prelates and the clergy?"

"Assuredly."

"Convoke them, then; and, despite Rome's threats, pronounce for the divorce. Leave Henry's sword and Clement's crosier to decide the rest."

"It were, indeed, one way," slowly repeated Wolsey, more like a man replying to himself than answering another; "but it would cast a brand whose conflagration ages would not extinguish. Heresy even now is rife within the land."

"What matter," observed the jester, "so you escaped the flames? As for the brand you speak of, it is cast already—Henry and Rome are twain at this moment."

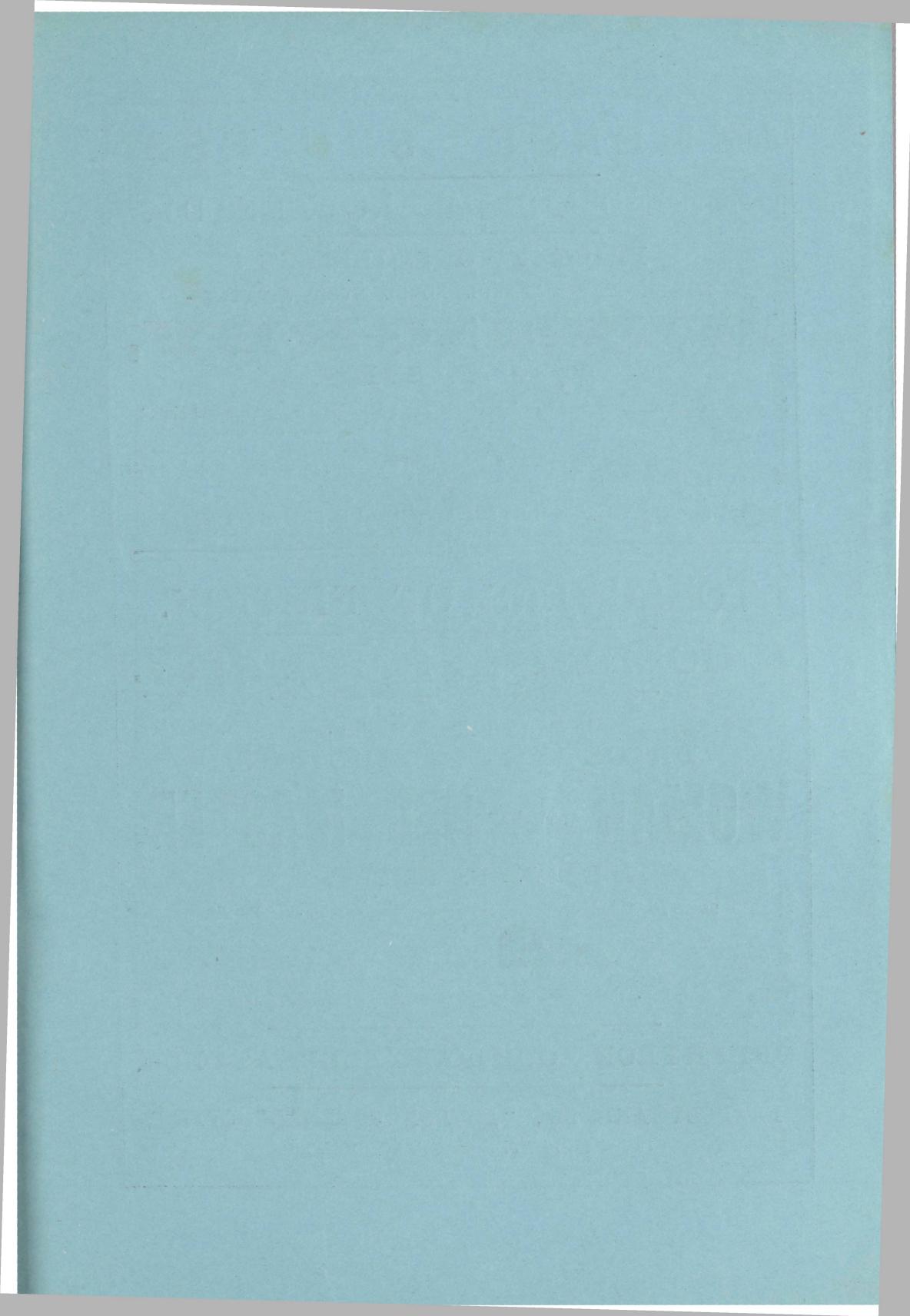
"It would stain my purple," added the cardinal.

"Cast the shadow of the imperial rag aside; men are beginning to hold it at its value."

"Destroy all hopes of the tiara which Clement's age and failing years hold out?"

"Dreams," interrupted his counsellor, "dreams, which France and Spain alike have fostered only to deceive. France fears; Charles hates as well as fears thee. As a subject already hast thou menaced the world—as a sovereign thou wouldest command it. Rivals as they are, they would unite on this one point against thee. The tiara," he continued, scornfully, "it is the *ignis fatuus* which leads thy steps astray, and blinds thy sight where thou shouldst see most clearly. Why, like a wayward child, pine for a bauble placed beyond thy reach?"

"Dream though it be," exclaimed the churchman, rising from his cushioned seat and pacing the chamber, "it is a glorious one, and crowned my sleep from boyhood. It cheered the obscure student in his patient toil—urged the aspiring statesman on to greatness—armed him against the nation's murmurs and the noble's scorn. I will not turn my footsteps from the path," he added, with a determination which showed how deeply the



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